DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 269 514 UD 024 857

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TITLE The Extrinsic Cultural Traits of Chinese Immigrants as Compared with Chinese in Taiwan and Other Non-Chinese in the U.S.A.
PUB DATE 17 Feb 84
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Cross Cultural Research (Boulder, CO, February 17, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; *Chinese Americans; Cultural Differences; *Cultural Traits; English (Second Language); *Immigrants; Social Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study whose purpose was to examine the speed of changing extrinsic cultural traits of Chinese immigrants in the United States and to determine cultural commonality among the groups. Three groups were selected for the study: 150 recent Chinese immigrants, 209 non-Chinese Americans, and 95 prospective Chinese immigrants from Taiwan. An attitude inventory scale was used to measure the sample's extrinsic cultural traits in four major areas: social interaction, English proficiency, American life-style, and future prospectives. It was found that extrinsic cultural traits of Chinese immigrants are significantly different from those of the other two groups. Statistical analysis indicated that Chinese immigrants are not significantly different from prospective Chinese immigrants in the way they assess their social interaction with the core society and lifestyle in the United States. It was also found that prospective Chinese immigrants were very enthusiastic about the prospect of living in the United States. The only cultural commonalilty found to be shared by all three groups was an interest in the availability to desirable clothing styles. (CG)

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The Extrinsic Cultural Traits of Chinese Immigrants as Compared With Chinese in Taiwan and Other Non-Chinese in the U.S.A.

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by

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Abstract

To examine the speed of changing extrinsic cultural traits of Chinese immigrants in the United States and to determine the cultural commonality (as assumed by Andrew M. Greeley) among the groups, three groups were selected - 150 Chinese immigrants(CI), 209 non-Chinese Americans (NCA), and 95 prospective Chinese immigrants(PCI). A Likert-type scale attitude inventory was employed for measuring sample's extrinsic cultural traits regarding four major areas: social interaction, English proficiency, American life-style and future prospectives.

It was found that extrinsic cultural traits of CI are significantly different from those of PCI and NCA. Futher statistical analysis indicated that CI are not significantly different from PCI on the aspects of assessing their social interaction with the core society and lifestyle in the United States. These results suggest that the CI are heading to the mainstreaming. The third analysis of the mean scores of individual items revealed PCI's enthusiasm about living in the United States.

In terms of Greeley's theory, the only cultural commonality shared by all three groups was the availability of desirable styles in clothing.

The project was supported by the Chinese Community in Houston. The author would like to thank Mr. William Dickerman and Mrs. Mackie Ealick for their invaluable assistance during project.

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The Extrinsic Cultural Traits of Chinese Immigrants as Compared With Chinese in Taiwan and Other Non-Chinese in the United States

The fact that the United States is a nation of immigrants has been gradually recognized and accepted by both the majority and minority groups as well as by immigrants themselves. Nevertheless, most of the newly arrived immigrants have tried hard to conform to the social behavior, educational values, democratic ideology and political status of the host country which is perceived by most foreigners as a super power and the strongest nation in the world. In the process of rapid conformity and one-way assimilation, as Gordon (1964) suggests, cultural assimilation takes place first. Cultural assimilation refers to the changes in a person's cultural traits which can be classified into the intrinsic and the extrinsic. The former includes value systems, beliefs, heritages, and languages, while the latter refers to lifestyles, behavioral patterns, manners and customs. Greeley (1974) assumes that the host people and immigrants share certain degrees of culture commonality in the first place. Gradually, the commonality is expanded as a result of cultural contacts over a period of time. In a sense, the enlargement of the cultural commonality is the product of assimilation and acculturation that has taken place within both groups. Based upon Greeley's assumption mentioned above, the author has decided to examine its validity by studying the extrinsic cultural traits of Chinese immigrants.

A. PROBLEM

The Census of 1970 (U.S. Bureau of Census 1970) indicated that half of the 435,062 self-identified Chinese Americans were foreign born. With the steady increase in Chinese immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong since 1968 (U.S.

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Bureau of Census 1969-1977), foreign-born chinese Americans are believed by now to outnumber the native-born. The total estimated Chinese population in the United States was over 700,000 in 1978 (Chan 1978).

The recently arrived Chinese immigrants have demonstrated different personality traits and value systems from those of American-born Chinese whose ancestors were early immigrants from China (Yao 1978 and Sue 1971). The first-generation Chinese immigrants have demonstrated more rapid assimilation in their extrinsic cultural traits than their intrinsic cultural traits (Yao 1979). In order to examine Greeley's assumption, the extrinsic cultural traits of Chinese immigrants have been compared with those prospective Chinese immigrants in Taiwan and those non-Chinese Americans in the United States. The results obtained among these three groups will determine the cultural commonality of the three groups and also the rate of change of the extrinsic cultural traits displayed by the selected Chinese immigrants in the United States.

B. METHOD

1. Sample:

One hundred and fifty recent Chinese immigrants (CI) were randomly selected from Houston, Dallas and Los Angeles. The mean age of the sample is 37.6 with an average of 19.1 years of formal education. The average number of years of residence in the United States is 12. In order to control the variables of age and education, 209 non-Chinese (NCA) graduate and undergraduate students were chosen from various subject areas at a state university. The 95 prospective Chinese immigrants (PCI) were participants in the Overseas Study Seminar sponsored by the Ministry of Education, the Republic of China in Taiwan. They were candidates for further education in the United States, and a substantial portion of them will eventually settle in the United States. All of them were college graduates and the average age was 24.4.

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2. Instrumentation:

A Likert-Scale attitude inventory measuring sample's extrinsic cultural traits was employed for this study (Yao 1978). The reliability of the 16-item instrument, "How Do I Feel about Living in the States?" is .75 as computed by Cronbach Alpha's factoral analysis. The instrument was available in both English and Chinese translations. There are four components assessing sample's adjustment in the areas of social isolation, English proficiency, lifestyle and future prospects. The component on the proficiency in English was deleted for non-Chinese American subjects. The Chinese version of the instrument answered by the prospective Chinese immigrants was stated subjunctively. The sample in Taiwan was asked to reveal feelings about living in the United States if they had ever been in the United States.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total scores and subscores of individual components received by the three groups were compared by the analyses of variance to identify significant differences.

All three groups were found to reflect a positive attitude toward American-style living. Yet, the degree of this positive attitude is manifested by the significant differences found among the three groups (Table I). Overall, Non-Chinese Americans (NCA) have the highest mean score as expected. However, the responses to individual items have generated some inconsistent results. In other words, in some aspects, Chinese people in the group held preconceived positive and realistic images of American life even before they arrived in this country. They had the intention to adjust well to American society.

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Table I

Comparison of all three groups: PCI, CT, and NCA

	Mean	Mean Square	Ratio	Level of Significance
Total Score	50.80	752.28	13.04	0.001
Sub-Score of social isolation	17.97	195.37	12.45	0.001
Sub-Score of English proficiency	2.46	1757.34	59.23*	0.001
Sub-Score of Lifestyle	18.35	99.44	10.97	0.001
Sub-Score of Future	22.45	740.14	163.72	

*Group NCA is excluded

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Upon their arrival and settling, Chinese immigrants have shown a significant gain in favor of American-style living although they still do not adjust as well as those native-born non-Chinese Americans. Their positive attitude and improvement in adjusting to American living may be contributed to by their educational background that provides them with a genuine picture of American life. Consequently, maladjustment is not a serious problem among educated Chinese immigrant

Further analysis of the four individual components, namely, social interaction, English proficiency, lifestyle and future outlook, indicates significant differences found among the groups (Table I). In order to detect any similarities among the groups, each group was cross-examined with another group in terms of each individual component. As shown in Table II, group CI and PCI are found to have no significant difference on social interaction while group NCA is significantly different from both of the other two.

It is suggested that some form of social isolation is shared by all Chinese living in the United States regardless of the locality of their residence. It is especially true for those overseas Chinese who tend to be insecure and have little interaction with the core society. Such personality traits cannot easily be changed through assimilation. Chinese American is not the only group of overseas Chinese who have such "social handicaps"; Chinese in Southeast Asia have had a long history of social isolation in the host countries (Purcell 1965). The data collected also indicate that Chinese immigrants do have higher scores than prospective Chinese immigrants, even though the difference is not significant at 0.01 level. This implies that CI are making progress in terms of their social interaction with the mainstream of American society.

Further analysis on individual items of social interaction has shown another interesting result: group PCI has the highest mean score on two of the six items related to social interaction. These two items are stated in Table III.

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Table II

Differences on Social Interaction Found between Two Groups

	Mean	Mean Square	Ratio	Level of Significance
Groups CI and NCA	17.88	214.83	14.89	0.001
Groups NCA and PCI	17.91	312.00	19.32	0.001
Groups CI and PCI	19.03	22.156	1.304	0.253

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Table III

Mean Scores of all Three Groups on Selected Items

Groups	Group PCI	Group_CI	Group NCA
Social interaction			
1. I see my neighbors.	3.43	3.13	3.00
2. I am involved in local community activities and/or civil clubs.	3.42	2.80	3.26
English Proficiency			
3. I have no problem communicating with people in English.	2.56	3.56	*No data
4. I prefer to use my native tongue for communication whenever possible.	2.76	2.37	*No data
Lifestyle			
5. I do not mind doing the routine work (mow the lawn, vacuum the house).	3.96	3.89	3.57
6. I (or my spouse) take part in maintaining my (our) family car.	3.72	3.63	3.99
7. I enjoy camping and other American out-door sports.	3.85	3.32	4.15

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It is evident that group PCI expects certain social interactions with the core society, interactions that are no longer practiced by the majority group. Therefore, after staying in this country for a period of time, they loose their initial zeal as compared with what they had in Taiwan. The finding becomes even more striking when the second item in Table III is examined. Evidently, PCI had anticipated being active in American local community activities. Based on the responses, they have shown a more positive attitude toward the involvement in community and civic activities than have the other groups. Unfortunately, their enthusiasm soon diminished. In the end they have all but withdrawn from community involvement.

Since English proficiency was not evaluated by the non-Chinese Americans, the comparison is valid only between groups CI and PCI. Language is one of the tools for assimilation into the American mainstream. Many newcomers from foreign countries confess that language is the major obstacle they encounter. The Chinese immigrants are no exception either. They had even anticipated the problem prior to their journey to the United States. It is found in Table IV that CI are much more confident in mastering English than their successors in Taiwan. This is due to the fact that CI have more opportunities for practicing oral English in the States than there were in Taiwan, even though English is taught in high schools. When the Chinese sample were asked about their preference for using English or Chinese in the States, group CI received a lower mean score than group PCI (Table III). The result suggests that CI prefer speaking Chinese whenever possible even though they have no communication problem in English. On the other hand, group PCI would like to use English more to have practice.

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It is interesting to note that groups CI and PCI show no significant differences in assessing their overall attitudes and feelings toward the American lifestyle; both groups have a positive attitude toward the way of life in the United States. The result implies that CI display no significant change in their general attitude toward American lifestyle since their arrival. On the contrary, group PCI has higher mean scores than group CI on three of the five items related to American lifestyle (Table III). It seems that group PCI is more eager to accommodate the American lifestyle in the three items than those CI in the United States. Their responses on Item #5 in Table III are even more positive than group NCA. It is believed that many prospective immigrants are ardently enthusiastic about the American way of life and feel that they will be willing to make adjustments in the promised land; yet, after their arrival their enthusiasm soon fades. They try to adjust to the new lifestyle, but to a great extent they are still under the influence of the old, Chinese lifestyle. In areas of busy lifestyle, sports, and daily routine household chores, subconsiously they seem to still favor the "good old days." Since the Republic of China is still behind the United States in industralization and automation, life is more easy-going for most Chinese people. Household repair work can be accomplished by servicemen for a reasonable fee. Thus, very few people are handy enough to maintain their own dwellings. The sports which are popular in Taiwan are not the same kinds enjoyed by Americans. Consequently, it requires more adjustment to make up for the differences. However, fashion reflects no difference found among all three groups.

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Table V

American Lifestyle

	Mean	Mean Square	Ratio	Level of Significance
Groups CI and NCA	18.60	89.52	10.69	0.001
Groups NCA and PCI	18.51	173.46	17.85	0.001
Groups CI and PCI	17.77	22.16	2.33	0.124

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When the sample were asked about their future in the United States, obviously group NCA expressed the highest level of confidence, followed by group CI and group PCI the least of all (Table VI). It is understandable that PCI are unsure about their future in a foreign country until they arrive. Since their arrival, CI fortunately have gained greater confidence about their future in the United States. Naturally, it takes time to compare NCA who are either native born or have been in this country for a long time.

Conclusion

It can be summarized that the extrinsic cultural traits of CI are significantly different from those of PCI as well as NCA. Further statistical analysis on the subscores of the four major components studied indicates that CI are not significantly different from PCI in assessing their social interaction with the core society and lifestyle in the United States. These results suggest that the CI have not adapted to the American life pattern very well. The third analysis of the mean scores of individual items, however, revealed an interesting finding regarding PCI's enthusiasm about living in the United States. In terms of Greeley's theory, the only cultural commonality shared by all three groups is the availability of desirable styles in clothing. This is the item which was found to be of no significant difference among all three groups. It can be concluded that Groups CI, PCI and NCA have the same attitude toward clothing styles and have had no problem finding them in the United States. As far as the samples selected are concerned, Greeley's assumption verifies only one item out of the 16-item attitude scale that measures the extrinsic cultural traits of the three groups--PCI, CI and NCA.

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Table VI

Future Prospectives

	Mean	Mean Square	Ratio	Level of Significance
Groups CI and NCA	12	448.94	104.54	0.001
Groups NCA and PCI	11.49	1413.82	304.9	0.001
Groups CI and PCI	9.76	330.92	70.27	0.001

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